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Evaluation

Evaluation of the UNDP contribution to strengthening electoral systems and processes

Executive summary

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I. Introduction

1. This evaluation of the UNDP contribution to strengthening electoral systems and processes covers UNDP electoral assistance since 1990. Conducted from June 2011 to January 2012, the evaluation is part of the 2011-2012 Evaluation Office programme of work approved by the UNDP Executive Board. It is the first corporate-level thematic evaluation that focuses on the organization's electoral assistance. The evaluation examines UNDP performance in strengthening electoral systems and processes, and UNDP strategic positioning and ability to promote more credible and inclusive electoral processes and institutions.

2. Elections are among the most important ways citizens participate in the decisions that affect their lives and hold their representatives accountable for results. As such, elections have been an integral aspect of United Nations-supported democratic transitions, decolonization processes and post-conflict peacebuilding efforts. General Assembly resolution 55/2 on the United Nations Millennium Declaration demonstrates the consensus among nations of the world to "spare no effort to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development". Elections stand as a cornerstone in this process.

3. UNDP electoral assistance is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which affirm that the will of the people is the basis of government authority, and that every eligible citizen has the right to take part in the government of her or his country. Credible, regular and inclusive elections confer the essential political legitimacy that underpins stable states and provides the mandates for governments to tackle the tough challenges of sustainable development. The ultimate UNDP goal is to "deepen democracy and accelerate sustainable human development by giving all people the ability to participate in the decisions that affect their lives".[1]

4. This evaluation examines the UNDP role in and contribution to achieving such objectives. It assesses the performance quality and added value of UNDP electoral assistance between 1990 and 2011, focusing primarily on the past 10 years. The evaluation examines the different approaches used to provide electoral assistance in diverse contexts and, based on the evidence collected, identifies the main issues, assesses what has and has not worked, and concludes with a set of policy-relevant, forward-looking recommendations. The evaluation aims to support future work by contributing to an understanding of how UNDP can provide assistance in a more effective and sustainable manner.

5. The evaluation covers UNDP support in all geographic regions and within diverse contexts, such as: mission (peacekeeping or political) and non-mission countries, varying political environments (immediate post-conflict, post-conflict/transition, more stable state) and different types of assistance (event- or process-driven). The evaluation pays particular attention to national perspectives on UNDP support of these important national processes. It is important to note that this not an evaluation of national electoral processes or events.

6. The evaluation uses the UNDP results framework for electoral assistance as the basis for forming a judgment on the value and quality of UNDP work. The framework links electoral assistance to a set of outcomes defined in UNDP strategic documents. These

[1] UNDP Strategic Plan, paragraph 1. 2008-2013

outcomes include achieving more credible and inclusive electoral processes, systems and institutions through more professional electoral administration and more inclusive participation. The evaluation also assesses country-office ability to manage electoral projects, mobilize funds and coordinate donors.

7. The evaluation team used the criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability to guide the development of evaluation questions, data collection, and analysis. A mixed-method approach was used to develop a robust basis for generating evidence and to enhance explanations that support the findings. Evaluation methods included case studies, broad-based surveys with a variety of stakeholders and expert informants, interviews, and meta-analysis of existing evaluations.

8. To assess work in different contexts, the evaluation included 11 country case studies of UNDP assistance in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Chad, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Mexico and Mozambique. The case studies facilitated comparing results across countries, regions and contexts to identify the most effective types of assistance for specific conditions and the factors that contribute to or inhibit outcome achievement. Beyond country-specific studies, other in-depth analyses of UNDP support included: a historical analysis of UNDP work dating back to 1990; an examination of UNDP partnerships in electoral assistance; an assessment of the nature, configuration and budget of the UNDP portfolio of projects and programmes; and a review of the appropriateness and sustainability of electoral technology introduced by technical assistance.

9. This evaluation also coordinated and exchanged information with several other evaluations, which were undertaken at the same time. These included: 'Evaluation of UNDP Assistance to Conflict-Affected Countries' (UNDP Evaluation Office); 'Lessons Learned on the Longer-Term Impact of United Nations Electoral Assistance' (UNDP Bureau for Development Policy); 'Lessons Learned on Integrated Electoral Assistance' (UNDP Bureau for Development Policy, United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Political Affairs); 'Entry Points for Gender Mainstreaming and Women's Empowerment' (UNDP Bureau for Development Policy); and 'Evaluation of Department for International Development Electoral Support Through UNDP' (United Kingdom Independent Commission for Aid Impact).

10. The main limitation to the evaluation stemmed from the enormous scope of support activities under review, programmatic and task-related complexities, and the vast range of contexts and conditions in which electoral assistance is provided. Equally important are the historical lack of consistency in classifying electoral projects in Atlas[2] and a general lack of institutional memory for completed projects at the country level, both of which made data collection and analysis difficult. Despite recent improvements to the Atlas system and its use, many UNDP electoral programmes remain under reported. To compensate, the evaluation team requested specific information from every country office, which provided additional data for 52 countries. For the in-depth country case studies, the politically sensitive nature of the evaluation theme, the number of planned elections and concurrent country-level evaluation missions affected the selection of case-study countries. Country-level events such as elections and other missions also influenced the timing of fieldwork, compressing the evaluation's time for analysis and report preparation.

[2] Atlas is the Enterprise Resource Planning database system used by UNDP to manage projects, finances, human resources, inventory and procurement, and to facilitate internal control and accountability.

11. UNDP support to strengthening electoral processes started in the 1970s and expanded significantly after the end of the Cold War, when many countries first began to organize multiparty elections. Initial efforts focused on filling the knowledge gap on how to hold a democratic election. As understanding of the process improved, the focus of assistance shifted towards increasing the credibility and legitimacy of electoral processes, institutions and outcomes. In working towards these goals, UNDP identified 10 main entry points, which currently guide how the organization provides electoral assistance: electoral system reform, strengthening electoral administration, building sustainable electoral processes, mobilization and coordination of resources, civic and voter education, electoral dispute resolution, support to domestic observation, working with political parties, media strengthening and increasing women's participation. UNDP provides both event- and process-driven support. The former addresses the needs of a particular event, such as voter registration or an election. In contrast, process-driven support takes a more holistic and inclusive approach, providing assistance before, during and after an electoral event. Such support takes the 'electoral cycle' approach, reflected in about half of the current UNDP projects.

12. Although electoral assistance is similar to other types of support in the democratic governance sector, it is quite different from non-governance development assistance. Elections are national events mandated by a constitution, law or a peace accord. At the same time, there are widely accepted international obligations for credible elections, including the need for a competitive choice, the right of all citizens to participate as voters or candidates, and a free, secret and universal vote. Electoral timelines, institutions, processes and actors are prescribed, directly affecting the nature, quality and results of assistance. Elections are high-visibility events and mix logistical and technical work with important political consequences. In addition to being time-bound, elections have large-scale organizational, procurement, technological, logistical, security and training needs. Elections deal with the competition for power and control over resources; governments are actors in these processes, and ruling parties compete in them. The electoral process can both generate and help resolve conflict. Elections may not guarantee democracy, but democracy cannot exist without credible elections. In a credible, successful election, all stakeholders—winners, losers and voters—trust the process and accept the results. Electoral assistance is provided within this highly political and often volatile context.

13. There is a continuing demand for UNDP electoral assistance. The number of UNDP-supported countries has increased from 28 in 2004 to 62 in 2011, with the highest number of countries in Africa (24), followed by Asia and the Pacific (12), Latin America and the Caribbean (12), the Arab States (7) and Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (7). In total, UNDP has assisted 83 countries with a budget of approximately US$2.9 billion and expenditures of approximately $2.2 billion between 1999 and 2011. This represents a range of 5–27 percent of all UNDP democratic governance assistance and 2–10 percent of total UNDP support. The higher end of such ranges reflects UNDP assistance during years of large post-conflict elections, such as those in Afghanistan and Sudan. According to the data supplied by 46 country offices, approximately 95 percent of electoral assistance funding is from non-core sources, which was most notable in Africa and Asia and the Pacific.

14. In the context of electoral assistance, the largest UNDP focus area is strengthening electoral administration, accounting for approximately 25 percent of the total effort[3] in the estimate of 39 country offices. Civic and voter education follows with 19 percent, and

[3] The term 'effort' describes the degree of UNDP engagement in a focus area in view of country-office personnel responding to evaluation questions. It does not necessarily parallel actual funds allocated to a project.

building sustainable electoral processes ranks third at 12 percent. Increasing women's political participation and working with political parties received 9 percent and 5 percent of support, respectively. Areas receiving the lowest level of assistance are electoral dispute resolution (4 percent), media strengthening, and working with political parties (5 percent each). UNDP provides both 'hard' and 'soft' assistance, defined for this evaluation as project, and policy advice/advocacy/brokerage, respectively. Of the 33 country offices that provided this information, 70 percent had both hard and soft assistance, and 18 percent reported more soft than hard assistance. All but one of these (UNDF Sudan) are in non-mission countries. UNDP also supports South-South and peer-peer cooperation: more than 60 percent of evaluation survey respondents reported South-South and peer-peer cooperation in UNDP support to electoral administration and 50 percent in its support to women's participation.

15. At the corporate level, the Democratic Governance Group of the Bureau for Development Policy manages support for electoral assistance and has a dedicated full-time advisor (sub-practice leader). The recent Global Programme for Electoral Cycle Support, a $50 million project with a three-year span, has expanded the elections assistance policy team to 19 officers working at headquarter and regional levels. UNDP has also entered into a number of multi-organizational partnerships; for example, in 2006, UNDP and the European Commission formed a Joint Task Force and adopted shared operational guidelines for implementing election assistance programmes and projects. UNDP has also entered into a number of memorandums of understanding for greater collaboration with democratic governance organizations and, through such partnerships, produced a number of joint products and tools on electoral matters.

16. UNDP provides electoral assistance within a larger United Nations context. A United Nations Focal Point for Electoral Assistance Activities was appointed in 1991, following the General Assembly resolution 46/137 to coordinate activities in the area and ensure system-wide coherence and consistency. The Focal Point, currently the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, assisted by the Electoral Assistance Department of the Department of Political Affairs, makes formative decisions about whether and how the United Nations provides assistance. UNDP assistance begins with a country government request or mandate from the United Nations Security Council or General Assembly. The nature of the request defines the parameters for UNDP action, and, in some cases, may limit UNDP ability to address some key components of the electoral support process. The Electoral Assistance Department and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations typically take the lead in electoral assistance in mission contexts, though UNDP usually plays a significant implementing role.

II. Findings

17. **UNDP is most relevant for its role as an impartial provider of electoral assistance, which supports processes and institutions so that they better reflect democratic values and international obligations.** However, this sense of purpose was not necessarily clear or consistently exercised at the country level. Some country offices saw their main purpose as supporting the government rather than the processes. In these cases, their programmes were seen as 'too close to government'.

18. **UNDP is highly relevant and adds value when it takes on a development role to strengthen electoral processes.** However, application of the United Nations electoral assistance policy framework is problematic and, in some cases, actually constrains UNDP ability to fully assume this development role, reducing the organization's relevance and effectiveness. This was most evident in the UNDP relationship with the Electoral Assistance Department of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs,

which has a shorter-term focus on achieving the political imperatives of a mission mandate or electoral event.

19. **Institutionally, UNDP understands the nature of electoral assistance in different political contexts, but this understanding is not always integrated into programme design or implementation.** UNDP has codified best practices and institutional policies, such as the electoral cycle approach, and developed, at headquarter level, a set of analytical tools. However, these are not systematically used or institutionalized at the country level, which remains predominately dependent on the analysis and individual experience of the Chief Technical Advisor and the political skills and interests of the Resident Representative.

20. **UNDP electoral assistance is relevant to improving human development and responding to national priorities to strengthen electoral processes.** In a mission context, UNDP assistance has successfully helped achieve processes mandated by peace agreements, helping foster peace and stability. In both mission and non-mission contexts, UNDP assistance was seen as relevant when it built national ownership of the electoral process and contributed to strengthened democratic governance and the ability of political and civil society to participate freely and more effectively.

21. **UNDP is generally effective at providing technical assistance that strengthens the work of electoral management bodies and results in the holding of credible electoral events.** UNDP technical assistance has improved the professionalism of electoral management bodies in most contexts. Similarly, such assistance has led to more credible electoral events than would have been the case in its absence. The degree of political goodwill among different stakeholders to hold free and fair elections was a critical contributing factor of this achievement, as was having sufficient time to appropriately design and deliver specific interventions.

22. **UNDP effectiveness at improving the enabling environment for more credible elections and processes does not match the organization's level of success at the technical level.** A credible electoral process requires meaningful participation by citizens, candidates, political parties and the media. UNDP has had some good results at the event level, as demonstrated by improved voter turnout or curbed media excess. However, the organization has been less consistent with proactively promoting the normative values of a free and fair process, thus limiting effectiveness.

23. **UNDP support has led to the development of more inclusive electoral processes and increased participation by women and other groups, but further effort is needed in this area.** UNDP support has helped improve the legal frameworks for equal participation by all stakeholder groups. This has increased voter turnout for women and marginalized groups, as well as increased the number of elected female officials. In some cases, UNDP-supported registration processes provided a civic identity to certain marginalized groups for the first time. Although the Global Programme for Electoral Cycle Support provides a platform for gender mainstreaming, UNDP efforts to mainstream gender outside of this programme remain inconsistent.

24. **UNDP can effectively deliver high-tech solutions for electoral processes in developing countries, but there are growing concerns about the cost and appropriateness of some of these systems in the development context.** UNDP has effectively delivered high-tech solutions in more than half (approximately 55 percent) of assisted countries. Although this assistance has been aid-effective in that it improved short-term electoral event goals, it has not been development-effective, as some of the implemented systems are not sustainable without continued external financial and/or technical support.

25. **UNDP programming has been able to mitigate or prevent some election-related violence.** Corporate understanding of the links between elections and violence, and of the possible UNDP mitigating role, is only beginning to be systematized. UNDP programmes have been successful in reducing or mitigating some election-related violence, but this—similar to programming decisions at the country level—depended greatly on the quality, political sensitivity and experience of Resident Representatives and Chief Technical Advisors. There are limits to conflict prevention efforts, however, if the root causes of the conflict or lack of political will to have a free, fair and peaceful process are not directly addressed.

26. **The UNDP process-focused (electoral cycle) approach is not systematically applied in practice, as most assistance still centres on events.** This process-based approach is a logical extension of the organization's development mandate and is used in about half of UNDP projects. Yet in many cases, the actual project focus remains on events and does not reflect a sustained effort to strengthen electoral cycle processes themselves. Where the cycle approach is genuinely followed, it is generally effective in developing national ownership, strengthening institutional capacities and creating a stronger enabling environment.

27. **Cumbersome procedures and slow recruitment and procurement processes affect UNDP management of electoral projects.** UNDP has managed billions of dollars in electoral assistance and is widely seen as the only organization that could manage such large amounts of funding. However, national and international partners are increasingly critical of the slow speed of UNDP institutional procedures, which, in some cases, have resulted in late delivery of commodities or staff, negatively affecting the supported processes and damaging UNDP credibility.

28. **Uneven quality of reporting on basket funds and project performance does not provide donors with adequate information on the use of their funds.** Electoral management bodies and donors have expressed concern that UNDP reports lack adequate performance data (reporting against outcomes) and financial information needed to assess the cost-effectiveness of assistance. Donors felt that pervasive lack of timely or adequate reporting has actually increased their transaction costs as a result of follow-up requests for information.

29. **UNDP is generally efficient at donor coordination and mobilization of funds, but donors are increasingly looking for more cost-effective solutions and more efficient project management and delivery.** UNDP basket funds have been the default electoral support mechanism for many donors. This has helped ensure consistency of approach, avoid duplication of efforts and raise substantial levels of funding for national electoral processes. However, internal inefficiencies and the high costs of some processes have resulted in some donors questioning the value-for-cost of their assistance through UNDP. These donors are now assessing other options.

30. **UNDP is a leader in the field of electoral knowledge, but this knowledge is not systematically applied or shared at the country level, affecting efficiencies and performance.** UNDP has played a central role in the codification of knowledge in electoral assistance. There is now a body of knowledge and expertise available for use in the design and implementation of country-level projects, and for use by local electoral management bodies, non-governmental organizations and other national stakeholders. The UNDP challenge is to ensure that the knowledge contained in such resources is used to guide country-level electoral programming, as opposed to the current practice, which bases decisions primarily on the individual perceptions and experiences of Resident Representatives, governance units or technical experts.

31. **UNDP implementation modalities for electoral assistance require balancing the need for impartiality with the efficiency required in electoral contexts.** UNDP uses both national execution and direct execution project modalities. Nationally executed projects help build local capacity and encourage national ownership. However, given the size, complexity and political nature of electoral projects and the processes they assist, national execution is more appropriate for contexts with higher levels of development and mature electoral management bodies.

32. **UNDP assistance that incorporates development and capacity-building considerations increases national ownership and contributes to more sustainable results.** UNDP projects that built capacity rather than replaced it showed a clear progression of national ownership—by electoral management bodies and civil society—of the activities and normative values supported by the programme. Such ownership has reduced the need for continuing technical assistance over time. Financial independence and long-term changes to the enabling environment depended to a great degree on the local political will for these processes.

33. **UNDP support to developing sustainable electoral processes requires an increased focus on the appropriateness and cost-effectiveness of solutions.** UNDP programmes have not placed enough emphasis on developing sustainable electoral processes that use cost-effective and context-appropriate systems and technologies. Some of these may be politically expedient, especially in mission and fragile contexts, but some countries are unable to sustain the systems without external assistance.

34. **The enabling environment or lack thereof, and whether root causes of local electoral problems are addressed, directly affect the sustainability of UNDP contributions.** Many of the problems relating to the enabling environment are structural and stem from the winner-takes-all nature of electoral and political systems. In these cases, UNDP and others have made substantial contributions when reform-minded governments or electoral management bodies were in place. However, sustaining such gains beyond the end of these progressive bodies' terms or the actual event has proven difficult if sufficient change has not also been made to the broader environment. Still, indicators suggest that gains in voice and accountability have been generally maintained over time.

III. Conclusions

Conclusion 1: UNDP has made significant contributions towards strengthening electoral systems and processes.

35. UNDP assistance has been instrumental to holding credible elections in complex post-conflict environments and amidst sensitive political transitions. In some cases, elections would not have happened without UNDP assistance. Its development perspective, larger democratic governance programme portfolio, long-term relationships with host governments and United Nations system status afford UNDP with the standing, expertise and moral authority to advise countries on these sensitive and highly political national processes. This position also confers upon UNDP the legitimacy to represent the international community in its collective efforts to support national electoral processes and help ensure they meet international standards. In fulfilling this role, UNDP has provided a highly valued service and contributed to the global expansion of democratic practices. At the same time, the results achieved remain predominately of a technical nature.

Conclusion 2: The UNDP framework for electoral assistance is well conceived and enables an effective response, if applied appropriately.

36. The evaluation findings validated the UNDP electoral assistance framework. UNDP was most effective at promoting sustainable and credible electoral processes, systems and institutions when electoral assistance was integrated into a more holistic package of support. Such support targeted the enabling environment alongside the technical aspects of the process, integrating a long-term vision for the end result of all assistance. Successful efforts combined soft and hard assistance, targeted policy makers and technical implementers, and strengthened the range of entry points and their ability to contribute to a stronger, more democratic process. UNDP efforts were more successful when its support went beyond electoral management body assistance to also strengthen other key stakeholders within civil society, legislature, political parties and the media. This package of assistance did not come entirely from UNDP or from any one group, but rather combined and coordinated the efforts of national and international actors and institutions. Successful efforts also placed the strengthening of electoral processes at the centre of the larger process of strengthening democratic governance. However, more systematic and sustained efforts to implement this type of longer-term holistic support are needed.

Conclusion 3: The impact of the UNDP contribution is reduced when normative United Nations values are not consistently applied in electoral programming and implementation.

37. UNDP is most effective when its assistance is grounded in the normative United Nations values for democratic development. UNDP is the only organization able to concurrently represent national and international interests, situate individual pieces of assistance within a broader framework of electoral and democratic development, and provide this larger sense of purpose. In this regard, UNDP is irreplaceable. As an institution, UNDP has fully embraced this role, which is clearly reflected in its strategic plans and programme guidelines. However, this is not as evident at the country level, where the sense of purpose seems to depend more on the individual perspectives of Resident Representatives and Chief Technical Advisors and, within United Nations mission contexts, on the role that the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and the Electoral Assistance Department envision for UNDP, rather than on delivering a consistent institutional response. Where such sense of purpose is missing from country-level programmes, UNDP credibility and its ability to make a meaningful difference is seriously undermined.

Conclusion 4: The building of cost-effective, context-appropriate and sustainable solutions is not consistently prioritized, limiting the effectiveness of UNDP efforts to build national ownership in the electoral processes.

38. Elections have become expensive undertakings. Some support, particularly in countries that received large-scale mission assistance, has resulted in the creation of systems that some of them cannot afford or manage without continued international assistance. As such, UNDP should focus on promoting more affordable and context-appropriate electoral systems and on building national capacity to manage them, thus avoiding a perpetual cycle of assistance and dependence. These are stated UNDP objectives and entry points, but they are not always put into practice as a result of the continuing event focus, unrealistic timelines and lack of national or international interest in the longer-term developmental aspects of electoral assistance. In addition, sustainability requires widespread national support for political processes. Ownership issues that manifest around the electoral process, such as low participation or conflict, will continue if not addressed, threatening democratic advances and their sustainability.

Conclusion 5: Procedures are not sufficiently adapted to the fast-paced needs of electoral support, adversely affecting UNDP performance and relevance.

39. This is a systemic UNDP issue that affects electoral assistance from initial decisions on the type of assistance to provide (a process that involves the Electoral Assistance Department and UNDP timing issues) to finding the right people to staff a project and procuring equipment or materials within the tight timeline of an electoral calendar. Procedural shortcomings in this area are also related to the lack of effective systems to ensure implementation guidelines are used at the country level, to maintain institutional memory in the country office, and to provide donors with accurate, sufficiently detailed and timely reporting on project performance and use of funds. Unless UNDP becomes more efficient, it will find it increasingly difficult to find donor support for its programmes—particularly in non-mission contexts, where other credible electoral assistance bodies can provide technical support.

Conclusion 6: UNDP partnerships affect its performance and may, in some cases, need to be framed differently from those of other UNDP programmes.

40. The government is the most important institutional partner for the UNDP country office in its development programme. However, in an electoral competition, the government is usually an actor in the electoral race and has a stake in the outcome. This changes the dynamics of the relationship and requires UNDP to respond first and foremost to national needs for a credible electoral process rather than government priorities, which are not necessarily identical. Although electoral management bodies are the most likely UNDP counterparts for providing electoral assistance, and the United Nations framework allows such bodies to submit national requests for assistance, many country offices are reluctant to provide assistance without the official approval from the executive for the content of the assistance programme. At the global level, UNDP efforts to develop partnerships with the European Union and others have effectively expanded the organization's reach. However, the substance of these partnerships needs to be better coordinated and leveraged at the country level. Within the United Nations system, the partnership with the Electoral Assistance Department should be better defined at the operational level, in order to not limit UNDP ability to design and implement a development-focused electoral assistance programme.

IV. Recommendations

A. Institutional and strategic direction setting

Recommendation 1: UNDP should intensify efforts to build the shared sense of purpose among headquarter, country-office and project teams, and to improve their understanding of the UNDP approach and programming options for electoral assistance.

41. UNDP should ensure that its institutional frameworks, vision for electoral assistance, and how these fit within the broader United Nations electoral assistance framework are more fully understood by staff and key stakeholders working at the country level. This should include training for country office and project staff on how UNDP promotes the normative United Nations values and fulfils an impartial role in the provision of electoral assistance. UNDP should better leverage the considerable amount of its knowledge products and in-house expertise through more systematic dissemination, networking efforts, and follow-up to its community of practice meetings. UNDP should also consider more intensive and comprehensive induction training—on the organization's institutional vision and implementation guidelines electoral assistance—for new Resident Representatives, Chief Technical Advisors, senior country office management and governance unit staff

Recommendation 2: UNDP should assess the way it frames relationships with national authorities for electoral projects, and develop a model of a long standing relationship within a country that embodies United Nations impartiality.

42. UNDP should guard its reputation as an impartial provider of electoral assistance, because this reputation can play a critical role in managing local political dynamics while promoting the broader requirements of electoral integrity. UNDP should ensure that its involvement in an electoral process serves as a mark of legitimacy, providing confidence to electoral management bodies to take the right decisions and dissuading nondemocratic forces from making frivolous claims or disrupting the process. UNDP should ensure that all country offices are aware of the option of providing support based on a request from an electoral management body. UNDP should focus its technical and normative assets on strengthening these independent institutions to enhance their standing in society and reinforce the political role they play as arbiters of the electoral contest.

Recommendation 3: UNDP should ensure a more consistent grounding of electoral assistance in the broader democratic governance framework to better incorporate the values of that framework.

43. UNDP should more firmly ground electoral assistance in its larger democratic governance programme to give more meaning to its support. Specifically, this means working more systematically to build synergies among different democratic governance programmes, some of which may already be assisting women's groups, civil society advocates, media, political parties and members of parliament. This process should start by taking advantage of existing opportunities and becoming more systematized as part of the Country Programme Action Plan process. This requires better diagnosis of governance issues and designing the governance programme, including electoral assistance, around that analysis. In contexts marked by a lack of political will, and where repeated electoral technical assistance has not resulted in the envisioned outcomes, UNDP should ensure that country offices are given full headquarter and regional support through mentoring and backstopping. In cases where there is no political will for competitive multi-party processes, UNDP should carefully assess its support options, as assisting parts of a process under such circumstances is tacit approval of them. Country offices with upcoming electoral events should be prioritized for training on the organization's new political economy-based analysis and on how to integrate this political analysis into soft and hard assistance. Strengthening contextual analyses and integrating early warning systems into electoral assistance programming could help country offices and regional bureaux identify potential triggers for electoral conflict and develop mitigation and prevention responses at the policy and technical levels.

Recommendation 4: Beyond addressing technical needs, UNDP programmes should strategically focus on the areas of critical need for credible, inclusive processes.

44. UNDP should be strategic in the choice of areas where it offers assistance. It should concentrate on ensuring that the most essential needs of the process are covered through its mobilization and coordination role, and, in conjunction with national and international partners, determine which partners are best placed and able to address specific needs. This process should be based on sound analysis of the political and electoral context, prioritization of needs and a clear exit strategy. UNDP should ensure that its own programmes effectively leverage its United Nations status, multinational nature and development mandate, and that such programmes focus directly on strengthening the credibility of the processes assisted. In particular, UNDP should do more to exploit its convening capabilities and its comparative advantage of facilitating national dialogue on needed electoral reforms and reducing the winner-takes-all nature of electoral systems. Strengthening multiparty political systems should be a part of this process.

Recommendation 5: UNDP should prioritize efforts to clarify the application of the United Nations electoral assistance policy framework to more effectively fulfil the institutional mandate of development assistance.

45. UNDP should seek to resolve the differences arising from the application of the United Nations electoral assistance policy framework where it affects UNDP ability to fulfil its development mandate. Senior UNDP managers should engage with the United Nations Focal Point to discuss these issues and seek a synergistic application of the framework so that UNDP, as well as other United Nations organizations, are able to make the best use of their institutional mandates in support of these important national processes. UNDP should continue its efforts through the Inter-Agency Coordinating Mechanism on Electoral Assistance to resolve operational issues.

B. Programmatic improvements

Recommendation 6: UNDP should strengthen implementation of electoral cycle projects so they are able to retain their process-oriented focus.

46. UNDP should strengthen its efforts to fully implement electoral cycle projects by focusing on the process alongside the event. UNDP should provide country offices, Chief Technical Advisors and project teams with training on the electoral cycle approach, improve dissemination of implementation guidelines, and promote increased networking and peer-to-peer exchanges among electoral management bodies and civil society organizations in the periods between electoral events. UNDP should also leverage the range of entry points in an electoral cycle approach to reach media, political parties, legislators and others to strengthen the process and promote the independence of electoral management bodies, whether they are formally independent or part of the executive branch. UNDP country offices should also be more proactive in the period between elections to maintain relationships with such bodies and election-oriented civil society organization (such as local observer groups) to promote improvements in electoral processes, electoral dispute resolution mechanisms, electoral management body independence and electoral law. Engagement with donors regarding post-election activities should begin long before the electoral event, in order to avoid losing momentum in the crucial months after an election. A post-election strategy that places due emphasis on sustainability and an exit strategy should be prepared as part of any election assistance project document.

Recommendation 7: More emphasis and effort are needed to reduce the costs of some of the supported processes and ensure they are context-appropriate and sustainable.

47. UNDP should renew and re-energize its efforts to develop cost-effective, sustainable solutions for electoral processes and institutions, and to build the national ownership needed to manage and maintain these systems. UNDP should facilitate the development of local solutions for local problems and avoid over-reliance on expensive imports, including inappropriately high-tech solutions implemented in low-tech contexts. UNDP should increase focus on strengthening national and, where relevant, sub-national capacity and expertise for strategic planning, management, timely procurement and budgeting. Appropriate benchmarking, monitoring and budgetary controls should be considered to help foster cost-awareness. Elections are big business for some, particularly for vendors, and UNDP should assist electoral management bodies and civil society organizations in developing transparent and accountable procedures that reduce opportunities for economic and political corruption.

Recommendation 8: UNDP should streamline its electoral assistance processes to ensure that they are more efficient in the fast-paced environment of the electoral process they support.

48. UNDP should review the chain of its electoral support processes from conceptualization to assistance delivery. Some procedural and efficiency issues are internal to UNDP, while others stem from the larger United Nations framework of response and require resolution. In particular, this applies to the relationship between UNDP and the Electoral Assistance Department and the extent of the latter's authority over UNDP programmes. Timelines to review include those pertaining to the receipt and processing of assistance requests, needs assessments and selection of their participants, and project formulation, negotiation and adoption. UNDP should also closely examine and streamline its recruitment and procurement processes. In addition, UNDP should encourage: the development of impact analysis for its work; a standard template to better track, monitor and report on the accomplishments of projects and their costs by intended outcomes; and more systematic efforts to document and share UNDP institutional memory. UNDP regional bureaux and the Bureau for Development Policy should strengthen oversight and monitoring of electoral programmes and improve the capacity of concerned staff, particularly for problematic processes or projects.